

CLASSIC COMPUTERS CLASSIC COMPUTERS AVOID PROBLEMS V

by Faye Deere

You've all heard me say, "If you own an Adam, get a fan!" You can't feel the heat building up when you put your hand on the computer, but trust me. It builds up inside the computer and makes Adam do strange things.

One of our ECAUG club members called me, asking if I had any idea why his printer would work for a while, and then start printing strange characters, and changing margins. I told him it was probably heat, and to get a small fan. He thought I was crazy, and packed his Adam off to the repair shop. Sure enough, it came back with a note that there was nothing wrong. Figuring he was going to have to buy a new printer anyway, and he had nothing to lose, he went out and bought a fan. Just to prove me wrong, I think. You guessed it. It worked! His printer stopped doing strange things!

Another Adam owner reported that his first data drive would tell him "Cannot Access This Drive." To see if it was the drive malfunctioning, he tried it in the other drive. He was able to get the file he wanted. Drive number one must be going bad. However, the next time he tried to get a file off the tape in the second drive, he got the same message. Cannot Access! Just to be different, he stuck the tape back in the first drive to see what would happen. He got the file! He asked what I thought the problem might be. Of course, I told him, "Get a fan." He got the fan, and his problem was solved.

Another member had problems with the computer locking up on him when he would try to save a document after spending long hours working on it. Before the file could be saved, Adam would lock up on him, and everything would be lost! This evoked a whole range of undesired emotions! He started saving more frequently, but the problem remained. I told him, "Get a fan!" Needless to say, he had no more problems.

Other hazards to Adam's health are dust, dirt, liquids, and smoke. Despite

Adam's hard, well constructed cover, particles can and do get in the cracks, and the vents provided for ventilation are an excellent means of entry. Cigarette smoke is especially harmful to a computer, so I do not allow smoking in the room with my Adam. It suffers enough wear and tear, without adding unnecessary dirt particles to the normal process.

Another thing I don't do anymore, is try to eat or drink while I'm working. If I get hungry or thirsty, I go to the kitchen. I have done this ever since I knocked over a cup of coffee and messed up my keyboard, thoroughly. My husband had to take it apart and give it a good cleaning. Can you imagine what would have happened had I spilled that cup of coffee down the vents!

When I'm not working, I keep my Adam covered. Even if I think I'm going to be away for a little while, I toss a cover over the keyboard, and I only uncover the printer when I am using it. Dust and dirt particles are a computer's worst enemy.

The electrical current in our area frequently fluctuates as a result of an erratic power supply. I'm sure our area is not the only one suffering from this malady, but I sometimes feel like I'm being cruelly singled out.

Utility companies furnish voltage at approximately 110 volts, but it may fluctuate between 90 and 130 volts. Most computers are not badly affected by the fluctuations as they usually take place slowly. However, there are times when the voltage may surge through the lines suddenly, for some reason. These surges can badly damage or destroy an unprotected computer. A fuse or circuit breaker is supposed to switch off a surge, but they can't do it fast enough to protect your electronic equipment.

It is a good idea to purchase a surge protector for your Adam. Surge protectors can switch off electrical charges before they enter your computer or printer and burn them out. Also, if you have all your components plugged in-

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to one surge protector power strip, everything can be turned on or off at the same time. It then becomes a simple matter of unplugging a single plug when a storm comes up.

A surge protector can cost anywhere from \$10.00 to \$150.00 and come housed in four or six outlet power strips. This way, whenever the power is switched on, so is their protection. During a storm, however, their protection may not be enough. An electrical storm can create a lot of sudden, strongly harmful electrical surges, so I always unplug my Adam at the first roll of thunder. A lightning strike close by can completely wipe out your whole Adam system! Unplug it!

The placement of your Adam and its peripheral hardware often depends on available space and where your electrical outlets are situated. Try not to use extension cords that are too long. They can then emulate an antenna and interfere, not only with the operation of your Adam, but the reception of your TV or monitor as well.

Another computer health hazard is static electricity. It is an invisible entity that can wipe out information on your disks without warning. It can also, in extreme cases, render your system inoperable. The sudden tingle you feel, or the spark you see after walking across the rug and touching metal is static electricity. Its current is so low that it doesn't harm you, but it can be fatal to Adam. It could blow out the chips in your computer or printer.

If your computer starts locking up, or displaying strange characters on your monitor, or your printer starts printing unwanted characters, first consider heat and get a fan. If this doesn't work, you can then consider that it might be the result of static electricity. Before packing Adam off to the local repairman, first consider the clothes you wear, or the rug on the floor as possible causes of the problem. Certain rugs and some clothes in particular (fuzzy wool sweaters), can build up static. Even fur lined slippers can do it, if you work in them before you get dressed in the

morning, or when you wake up in the middle of the night, and can't go back to sleep.

There are several ways to fight static build-up. You can put an anti-static mat under your keyboard, or on the floor under your chair. There are also anti-static sprays available. Spray the area surrounding your computer and printer about twice weekly, but be very careful not to spray Adam. The liquid could seep into the computer's inner workings and cause corrosion or other assorted damage.

Another cause of electrical static could be your home's heating system. In winter, your heating system could be robbing the air of much needed moisture. If this is happening, your clothes will cling to your body and your hair will "throw" sparks when you brush it. The purchase of a humidifier would solve this by controlling the amount of moisture in the air, and putting back what the heating system removes. This could prolong the life of your computer, and maybe your own, as well.

If you don't buy a humidifier, and attempt to restore some moisture by boiling water and letting steam put moisture into the air, be careful! Too much moisture could build up in certain areas and cause mineral deposits on Adam's components. It could also cause Adam to rust, like the Tinman!

Adam can take a hot room or a cold room, but sudden temperature changes are a health hazard. Taking your equipment from the cold to a warm, moist room could lead to condensation inside the components which could cause a short circuit if Adam is turned on before it is completely dry. This, also, could cause rusting. A rapid temperature change could also cause the metal and other materials in a computer to rapidly contract or expand, depending on the temperature switch. This could cause stress on the delicate electronics. Something like metal fatigue, and you know what happens when that occurs!

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Be careful when looking for a place to put your computer. If the room gets very cold, and you put Adam near a heater, you could cause the internal boards to warp. You wouldn't be helping your disks much, either. Likewise, if you place Adam in strong, direct sunlight that is uninterrupted all day, you run the same risk.

Placing Adam close to a telephone or stereo system could be a bad move, also. The telephone's ringing causes coils in the receiver to give off a small magnetic field that could wipe out data on your disks. The stereo speakers have coils that cause a similar reaction. In fact, Adam itself, as well as the TV, monitor, printer, or CPU create a

magnetic field that could wipe out data on your tapes/disks. It is, therefore, a good idea to store your tapes/disks some distance away from these components. You don't have to go to extremes, but keeping your tapes/disks stored right next to any electronic equipment that creates a magnetic field is asking for trouble.

With a little TLC (Tender Loving Care), Adam will serve you long and well. It's well worth that small amount of effort. Adam has managed to survive in spite of being abandoned by Coleco. That must say something for its ability to hold its own in the wonderful world of computers. Happy computing!